The Master's "Well Done!"

Second in the series: Heaven’s Joys

# Scripture: Matthew 25:14-30

# Key Thought: For those who are prepared, one of the great joys of heaven will be to hear the Master's "Well done!"

# Intro:

Todd Burpo was a part-time pastor in the upper Midwest. In 2003 his four-year-old son Colton was hospitalized for emergency surgery for a ruptured appendix. The medical situation was dire as a previous hospital had missed the diagnosis. More than one surgery was required, but Colton finally recovered. The family began to discover by accident that four-year-old Colton had died and had an experience of heaven. If you haven’t read the book, Heaven Is For Real, I encourage you to do so. Colton began to tell them of his experiences in heaven, along the way relating facts about their extended family that he would have had no way of knowing. The book is an account of how the family began to discover his experiences. There seems to be no doubt that Colton had been to heaven and back. Today I want to share with you one small incident from later in the book. As in the case with many pastoral families with young children, the children often must accompany the parents to pastoral type events. In this case, circumstances dictated that Todd take his now five-year-old son Colton with them to the nursing home to visit an elderly retired minister who was dying.

(Heaven is for Real pp 118, 119 Colton advised him, “It’s going to be okay. The first person you’re going to see is Jesus.” )

Colton’s experience does not have the authority of Scripture, but it is a human testimony that urges us strongly to pay close attention to what the Bible tells us about how to go to heaven and what to expect.

None of us knows when our time will come. Jesus may return at any time. Or our own time to die may come unexpectedly upon us. We do not like to talk about these subjects much and generally avoid them. But as a matter of fact, we have no more important business that to be ready we the time arrives, whether it is the time of our death or the day of Jesus’ appearing, of which Jesus often spoke.

Our text today is in one of sections of the Gospels where Jesus was speaking of his second coming. This parable of Jesus is part of a much larger section that comprises Matthew chapter 24 and chapter 25. It is a discourse of Jesus answering two questions of his disciples. They had asked about Jesus’ prediction that the temple would be torn down and about his second coming. They thought that two such things must go together. The answer that Jesus gives seems to us to mix a little material that applies to the physical destruction of the temple with much more that refers to his second coming. Particularly after Matthew 24:37, the focus in Jesus’ answer is entirely on the second coming.

“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Matt 24:36-37 NIV

Leading up to the parable that we are studying this morning Jesus has made several key points about his second coming.

* His coming will be preceded by a time of trouble (Matt 24:22,29).
* His coming will not be a hidden thing (Matt. 24:23, 26, 27). Rather, it will be majestic and awesome (Matt. 25:30, 31).
* Alert Christians will not know exactly when, but they will have a sense that it is near (Matt. 24:32, 33, 36). However, both inattentive Christians and non-Christians will be surprised as by a thief (Matt. 24:39, 40, 43).
* Jesus’ main emphasis is on watchfulness and readiness. The wise Christian will be alert for the Master’s return (Matt. 24:45-50), just as a good employee is ready for his earthly boss to return from a trip. Again, at the beginning of Chapter 25, the wise Christian will be watchful and prepared for the Master’s return (Matt. 25:1-13). In this latter passage, Jesus uses as an illustration the local custom of wedding attendants waiting for the bridegroom—an especially apt theological picture since the church is called in Scripture, “the bride of Christ.”

# The Day of our accounting

In Mathew 25:1, the time of the second coming is introduced with the key phrase “at that time”. In a parallel passage in Luke, the phrasing is “the Day the Son of Man is revealed” (Luke 17:30). In that Luke passage we also read,

Then he said to his disciples, “The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. People will tell you, ‘There he is!’ or ‘Here he is!’ Do not go running off after them. For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. Luke 17:22-24 NIV

This reiterates what Jesus sad in Matthew that his coming will not be a hidden thing.

In the New Testament, the expression “the day of the Lord Jesus” or “the Day of the Lord” or even just “that Day” are common expressions for the second coming or the complex of events connected with the second coming (Rom. 2:16; 1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Cor. 1:14; Phil. 1:6, 10; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 1:10; 2:2; 2 Tim. 1:12, 18; 4:8; 1 Peter 2:12; 2 Peter 2:9).

The important point which Jesus is going to emphasize in this current parable is our accountability before Him on that Day.

In Matt, 25:37 in his parable about the bags of gold (also called the parable of the talents), Jesus connects the day of his coming with the day of judgement of our works. This does not necessarily mean that we will be judged at the very moment Jesus appears. But it means that the concepts go inextricably together. To speak of the second coming is to have our accountability before God for our works in our minds as well. When the second coming happens, our time of labor for Jesus here on earth will be over and our time of accounting for our work will have arrived.

Paul explained that this time of accounting will arrive someday for all of us.

We are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. For we live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. 2 Cor 5:6-10 NIV

If you have heard Christian teachers on TV, you may have heard them mention the Greek word in this passage. It is “Bema” which referred to a raised platform with steps and either a rostrum for speeches or a chair or throne for a magistrate, tribunal or other person in authority to pronounce judgments (step is the root idea of the word). The word “Bema” is also used in Rom 14:10 to refer to the judgement seat of God (Greek - theos). I have never found it useful to try to set time frames and scenarios for what happens when Jesus comes. But what is useful, indeed what is crucial, is that we hear the message that Jesus is giving us.

A Day of accounting is coming, and we need to be ready for that day!

Paul wrote about that accounting in the passage we used in our call to worship:

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames. 1 Cor 3:10-15

In the message to the church of Thyatira, that Jesus gave to John in Revelation we read,

Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. Rev 2:23 NIV

# The basis of our accounting

## The parable is about those already in the household.

This parable is not about how we earn our way into the household of God – we can’t do that. Those in the parable are already part of the household. So, this parable is not a place to argue works versus faith. We become part of the household of God be giving hospitality to Jesus in our hearts and minds as the Gospel says.

*He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. John 1:11-12 NIV*

But as members of the household of God, we need to know that there will be an accounting for us all. What does it take to receive the Master’s “Well done?”

## Faithfulness not success

It is important to note that the key word in Jesus’ commendation of the first two workers is not “success” or “fruitfulness” or anything similar. Rather each one is commended as a “good and faithful servant.” The fact that the first two employees receive the same commendation for different responsibility levels underscores the fact that the commendation emphasizes “faithfulness.” The contrast with the third servant also tells us that part of the goodness and faithfulness which was rewarded had to do with their industry and initiative, characteristics that were lacking in the third servant.

As David stated it,

The Lord rewards everyone for their righteousness and faithfulness. 1 Sam 26:23

## Morality not pleasure

People today are interested in self-fulfillment—in following their own fancies, in pursuing their own pleasures. But the accounting that God is going to require will look at something different.

Our conscience tells that God will be looking at our moral behavior. That is true. Jesus spoke about his judgement.

For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. John 5:26-29 NIV

Jesus will be looking at the morality of our decisions. But there is more.

## Stewardship not prosperity

Commentator Matthew Henry, in applying this parable suggests a parallel with Jesus empowering his church to do his work.

When Christ went to heaven, he was as a man travelling into a far country; that is, he went with a purpose to be away a great while. [2.] When he went, he took care to furnish his church with all things necessary for it during his personal absence. For, and in consideration of, his departure, he committed to his church truths, laws, promises and powers; these were the —the great depositum (as it is called, 1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 1:14), the good thing that is committed to us; and he sent his Spirit to enable his servants to teach and profess those truths, to press and observe those laws, to apply those promises, and to exercise and employ those powers, ordinary or extraordinary. Thus Christ, at his ascension, left his goods to his church. (from Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, PC Study Bible Formatted Electronic Database Copyright © 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All Rights reserved.)

I agree. The Master is interested not just in our moral behavior, but also in our stewardship of his spiritual gifts which he has entrusted to us for the work of his kingdom. How we have used the gifts he has given us to be a positive influence for him will be big part of our accounting.

# The joy of hearing, "Well done."

I remember distinctly when I was in the military the time when my Captain would review my performance. I still recall some of the things that were said in those reviews.

I also recall during my service as a junior officer in the military being on the other end and being the one to give reviews to some of the people who were under me. I remember what a pleasure it was for both of us when the things to be talked about were positive. And I remember how difficult it was when the review I had to give was not so good.

In my current job as your pastor, once a year I meet with the district superintendent for my one-on-one as it is called. It is a time for my district superintendent to review my performance; it is a time to discuss goals; and it is also a chance for me to help our district superintendent understand our situation. I know how good it feels when the district superintendent comments positively on the things that are happening in our church.

Most of you have been in job situations, or currently are in job situations where you can relate to what I’m talking about when I mention an annual review.

The parable that we’re talking about today is a parable about a performance review. The circumstances are a little different. Jesus constructs a story about a man with some wealth who went away on a long journey. Before he left, he brought in his most trusted servants and divided up some of his wealth among them. They were expected to do business with it as he would have with the anticipation that they would report to him when he returned. Jesus tells us what happened when the master returned.

But Jesus did not tell the story just to talk about job performance reviews. He told the story because the situation paralleled what will happen when we all have our ultimate performance review. As commentator Matthew Henry suggested, we have all been given gifts, resources, time and opportunities by God for use in helping others and advancing the kingdom of God. Jesus said that when he returns, it will be a little bit like a master coming back from a long trip and asking for an accounting from his servants. Jesus himself will ask for an accounting from us.

How wonderful it will be to receive those words, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” The joy of that moment will exceed all the joys of any positive performance review that we have ever received or ever could receive on this earth.

First of all, on this earth all our reviewers are all fallible, prone to overstatements, understatements and downright mistakes. But on that day, when Jesus is the judge, our reviewer will be perfect, infallible, completely accurate in his judgments. So, our review at that moment will have more authority and more weight than any review we have ever received.

Second, the reviews that we receive on this earth cover only a limited spectrum of our lives, a limited timeframe, and only our work segment. If we receive a bad review from an employer, we might even make the excuse that we don’t like the job anyway. Or we could just think about all the rest of our life in which we take a great deal of pleasure. Or maybe we change jobs; or turn in avocation into our job. But this review of which Jesus speaks, when He comes again will be different; it will cover our whole life, all aspects of it and all its time span. This review will be completely comprehensive. The only things missing from it will be things that have been forgiven; they will not be considered, they will not be part of the record to be reviewed. So, to receive in this heavenly accounting the summary report, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” will be even more powerful.

Third, there’s always the matter of what happens as a result of a performance review. On this earth, performance reviews are usually in some way related to compensation. It has not really been that way in the jobs I’ve held. In the lower ranks of the military, at the time I was in, advancement had more to do with putting in your time. And in the Methodist ministry, the pastor is on an annual salary controlled by the church not by the district superintendent. But in most job situations, if you get good performance reviews, your pay and/or benefits increase. In the story that Jesus told, there was also a reward for the positive evaluation of the master. Both of the people who received the commendation, “Well done,” also received two rewards.

* First, they received added assignments. When we think of the application of this parable to heaven, this has immense implications. Some people think of heaven as a lazy place. This line in the parable should silence such speculation. I believe that the use we make of the gifts that God has given us here is preparing us for the uses we will be able to make of those gifts in God’s service in heaven.
* Second, the faithful servants received an invitation to, “Enter into the joy of your master.” In the terms of the story that Jesus is telling, “a number of scholars believe that the noun ‘joy’ here is used with the meaning "feast" or "banquet." (from the UBS New Testament Handbook Series. Copyright © 1961-1997, by United Bible Societies.) One cannot help but remember that Jesus in another place talked about the fact that in the kingdom there would be a great feast and he himself would serve.

It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak. Luke 12:37-39 NIV

# Conclusion

The book of Revelation also speaks about a great feast in the ultimate kingdom of God.

Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

“Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns.
Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!
For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.”
 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.”

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people.)

 Then the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” And he added, “These are the true words of God.” Rev 19:6-9 NIV

Interestingly, the picture of the feast in the book of Revelation uses the metaphor of a wedding feast, the same metaphor which Jesus used in the parable just preceding the one we are studying which was also about his second coming.

So, when we think about our lives, when we think about what motivates us to do this or that, let’s ask ourselves a simple question. Which choice will I be glad that I made on the day of Christ’s appearing? Which choice will help me to hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord!